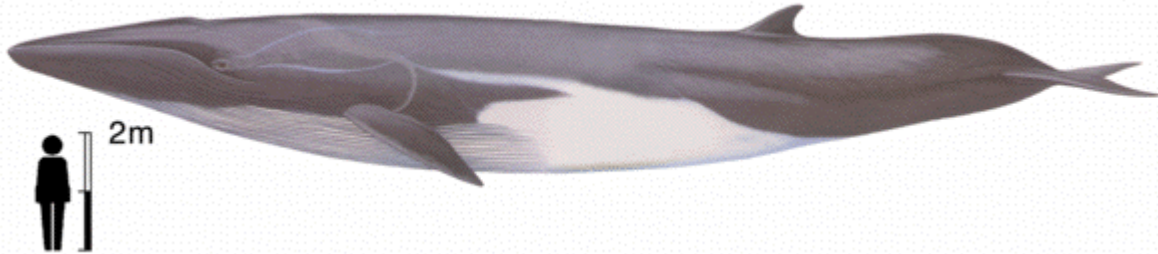




## Klamath Network Featured Creature

### December 2005

#### Fin Whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*)



##### FIELD NOTES:

Creatures outside our ordinary existence sometimes appear and remind us that they too have an ordinary existence of their own. Recently, a fin whale beached upon the shores of Redwood National and State Parks. This unfortunate event for the whale provided an opportunity to learn about these seldom seen creatures.

##### General Description and Behavior:

This creature is the second largest animal living on earth, just behind the blue whale. The longest specimens can reach 26 m (85 ft) in length and top 120,000 kg (265,000 lbs). The massive size of this whale does not slow it down. Its relatively sleek and streamlined body can reach speeds of up to 37 km/hour (23 miles/hour). As one of the fastest great whales, it is often called the “greyhound of the deep.”

##### Feeding:

Grooves on the throat of the whale help to streamline it and also function in feeding. They dramatically expand to accommodate large amounts of water. Then, as the water is expelled, baleen filters trap up to 2 tons of food a day for the whale’s dining pleasure, including krill and small schooling fish.

##### Where to see it in the Klamath Parks:

You may be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of a swimming fin whale from the shores of Redwood National and State Parks, where they are occasional migrants. However, because they prefer the deep sea, you are unlikely to ever see one in your lifetime. If you missed the one that washed ashore upon Freshwater Spit in Redwood this September, some remains are still visible on the beach. Within two years, the skull and other parts will be available to see and study at the Humboldt State University Vertebrate Museum Mammal Collection.



##### Distribution:

Although rarely observed by humans, these creatures live in every ocean on the planet. They usually prefer deep waters beyond the continental shelf but are occasionally seen nearshore.

##### Status:

These creatures’ predilection for speed and the vastness of open ocean kept them relatively safe from early whalers. However, as whaling methods advanced and blue whale populations were depleted, fin whales became the next target. In the twentieth century, records indicate the killing of 725,000 fin whales by whalers, leading them to become endangered around the world. By 1966, fin whales were placed under full protection of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Scientists do not have enough information for exact population numbers. Estimates vary widely between about 50,000 to 120,000 individuals in existence today, with perhaps as few as 2,000 in southern oceans.

##### Additional Information:

<http://www.acsonline.org/index.html>  
<http://seamap.env.duke.edu/species/tsn/180527>